DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 202 378 HE 013 893

AUTHOR Traynham, James G.

TITLE The Bakke Decision and Graduate School Admissions: What Is Equitable?

INSTITUTION Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colo. Inservice Education Program.; State Higher Education Executive Officers Association.
SPONS AGENCY Kellogg Foundation, Battle Creek, Mich.
REPORT NO IEP-514
PUB DATE Oct 78
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at a Seminar for State Leaders in Postsecondary Education (New Orleans, LA, October 1978).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Admission Criteria; *Affirmative Action; *College Admission; *College Entrance Examinations; Educational Opportunities; Equal Education; Graduate Study; Higher Education; Minority Groups; Predictive Measurement; *Race; Scores; Tests
IDENTIFIERS *Graduate Record Examinations; *Seminars for State Leaders Postsec Ed (ECS SHEEO)

ABSTRACT

The question of how graduate schools can include race as an admission criteria and give equitable treatment in admissions decisions is addressed by considering some aspects of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores and the use and misuse of test scores in admissions procedures. The GRE is used in admissions procedures to prove an across-the-board measure of academic potential among all the applicants. If the GRE score plays a significant role in the admissions decision, equitable treatment requires that all applicants with equal academic potential have equal chances to be admitted. Although the Graduate Record Examination Board has cautioned against the use of any set score as a cut-off for a favorable admissions decision, some graduate schools and some departments use a cut-off number. Since performance on the GRE varies widely with the field of study, it is suggested that a field-conscious aspect to admissions decisions might be desirable. It is noted that GRE scores for graduate students at Louisiana State University also vary with race. It is suggested that in order to have applicants fall within the same range of predicted academic potential, different scores would have to be used for different races, just as it would be necessary to use different scores for different fields. It is suggested that admissions procedures need to be reevaluated to determine whether equal treatment (uniformity in application of standards) has actually led to equitable treatment of applicants. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED202378

Inservice Education Program (IEP)

Paper Presented at a Seminar for State Leaders in Postsecondary Education

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

ECS

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

THE BAKKE DECISION AND GRADUATE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS: WHAT IS EQUITABLE?

JAMES G. TRAYNHAM

Vice Chancellor for Advanced Studies and Research
and Dean of the Graduate School
Louisiana State University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

New Orleans, Louisiana
October 1978

IEP Paper No. 514

NE 013 793

Education Commission of the States

Inservice Education Program (IEP)
Education Commission of the States
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300
Denver, Colorado 80295

SHEEO

The IEP Program has been supported primarily by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation with additional funds from the Education Commission of the States, the Frost Foundation and the State Higher Education Executive Officers

THE BAKKE DECISION AND GRADUATE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS:
WHAT IS EQUITABLE?

(Presentation at the Bakke Seminar, coordinated by SREB, in New Orleans, October 19, 1978)

The implications of the Bakke decision for admissions procedures are clouded, at best, but they may appear clearer for graduate schools in general than they are for professional schools such as law and medical schools. Admissions to graduate schools are seldom restricted by a pre-selected number of places. Most graduate programs with which I am familiar will admit all qualified applicants--and then wish for more. Financial aid to enrollees may be limited, and that limitation may crucially affect the applicant's response to admission, but admission itself only infrequently depends on competition for a number of places. Therefore the direct impact of Bakke on graduate school admission policies and procedures, except for those infrequent programs with limited places, appears to be meager.

The appearance of meager direct impact may dull our appreciation of significant, indirect impact, however. In spite of the differences among the Justices on details and on the pathway to the position of a majority in this case, I believe that the expectation, the requirement of equitable treatment permeates all of the opinions. The dilemma lies in the question, how can we include race and give equitable treatment in our admissions decision-making. So far as graduate school admissions (and probably professional school admissions) are concerned, my thesis is that equitable treatment may result from equal protection but not necessarily from equal treatment.

Equitable means fair, impartial, just. Those meanings for equal are now archaic and misused; equal means of the same number, uniform in operation.

There is a distinction, and a uniform operation in use of test scores, for example, may not in fact be fair, impartial, and just.

I shall attempt to illuminate this issue by describing some aspects of the Graduate Record Examination scores, which are used widely by graduate schools in admissions procedures, including recent analyses by my Associate Dean Carolyn Hargrave of the significance of those scores for the black graduate students enrolled at LSU. I strongly suspect that similar significance and conclusions would emerge from analyses of test scores used by professional schools, but I do not know of such analyses. Your attention will be directed to the use and misuse of test scores in admissions procedures and the need for, not just the permissibility of, race-consciousness in such use.

The GRE is used in admissions procedures, I believe, to provide an across-the-board measure of academic potential among all the applicants, wherever and whatever might be their undergraduate preparation. The GRE score is used as a predictor of academic performance in graduate school; that is, as a measure of qualification for admission. To the extent that the GRE score (or any other measure) plays a significant role in the admissions decision, equitable treatment requires that all applicants with equal academic potential, or with equal measures or estimates of that potential, have equal chances of being admitted.

The Graduate Records Examination Board and staff have cautioned against the use of any set score as a cut-off for a favorable admissions decision. Yet some graduate schools and some departments use a cut-off number. A score of 1000 for the two-part aptitude test is often cited as the cut-off number. What do you get if you use a cut-off of 1000 (or any other score)? You get a wide variation in academic potential. For English or Microbiology, you get students in the upper half of all students taking the GRE and indicating intent to study in those fields; for Physics and Computer Science,

you exclude only about 25% (mean scores, 1200 or over); for Education and Speech, you exclude about 70%. Performance on the same test varies rather widely with the field. Now what is the equitable goal for graduate admissions? To have the same academic potential regardless of field, or to have the equivalent academic potential (say, in the top half of the national pool) for each field? I believe that it is reasonable, defensible, logical, equitable to choose the latter.

GRE scores vary with field--that is documented on a national scale--and a field-conscious aspect to admissions decisions, though seldom used or advocated, seems untroublesome, even desirable. GRE scores for LSU graduate students also vary with race. The mean scores for black students are lower than the mean scores for white students by about 270 points, about the same difference as between the national mean scores of students planning to enter Physics or Classical Languages programs and those planning to enter Library Science or Speech ones. Although the GRE Board has published data on variation of mean scores by field and by sex, it has not published such data by race. In the most recent GRE Technical Manual, there is a qualitative statement about the variation with race (mean scores for blacks are lower than those for whites), but no quantitative data are given. For LSU students, GRE scores are at least as well correlated with grades in graduate school for black students as for others. A recent report from the Ford Foundation about the records of 10 years of Ford Foundation Minority Fellowship recipients agrees with our conclusion, even to the magnitude of the correlation coefficient: GRE scores for both the LSU sample and the Ford Foundation sample are "correlated with graduate school grades and with whether or not one eventually earns the doctorate"; for both samples, undergraduate grades of blacks are not correlated with graduate school performance. The correlations between GRE scores and graduate school performance for

minority students and for other students are about the same, but the scores for the groups are different. That is, if we want to select a group of applicants for admission and want to have them fall within the same range of predicted academic potential, we should use different scores for different races just as we should use different scores for different fields.

Different people with different points of view will generate different speculations about why GRE or other test scores vary with race. Whatever the correct reason, pretension that the difference does not exist is clearly disadvantaging and unfair to some groups. If the available data from the two small samples mirror nationwide data, use of the same numerical cut-off or requirement, which superficially appears equitable, in fact imposes a higher measure of academic potential on the lower scoring group than on the higher scoring one.

The Bakke decision may seem merely to brush graduate schools with only infrequent limitations on numbers, but it should prompt serious reevaluation of admissions procedures to discern whether equal treatment has actually led to equitable treatment of applicants. Among the several documents I studied for this meeting was A Report of the American Council on Education—Association of American Law Schools Committee on Bakke, which included the following passage: " There is an inevitable tension between the concept of fairness, which implies uniformity in application of standards, and discretion, which implies informed judgment not bound by rigid standards. For Justice Powell and perhaps for other members of the Court, the scales tip toward the use of informed judgment..." I agree with the focus of the passage but quarrel with the antonymous positioning of fairness and informed judgment. The passage says: "...the concept of fairness, which implies uniformity in application of standards..." That, I believe, may be the key

to the Bakke decision dilemma: uniformity in application of standards. But our best informed judgment is required for uniformity in application of standards, to tell us what the numbers really mean. Equal does not always imply equitable. And equitable, not equal, means fair.

James G. Traynham, Vice Chancellor
for Advanced Studies and Research
and Dean of the Graduate School
Louisiana State University